



VIRGINIA **ORGANIZING**



A Tribute to Leaders
Annual Report 2017

From Chairperson Del McWhorter:

Thanks to our generous supporters and brave, dedicated leaders, 2017 was a very successful year for Virginia Organizing. Some highlights:



- Virginia Organizing members attended a bill signing in Richmond, supporting Governor Terry McAuliffe's "Classrooms not Courtrooms" initiative. The Virginia Department of Education issued a model memorandum of understanding and a program guide for school resource officers that was modeled on our Fredericksburg Chapter's work with the Spotsylvania County School System.
- We held rallies and media events throughout the state to save the Affordable Care Act and expand Medicaid in Virginia.
- We fought the return of abrupt and questionable deportations and held educational sessions so that immigrants and their allies would know their rights.
- We coordinated constituent meetings with a host of Commonwealth's Attorneys and police chiefs about immigration and asked them to address citizen complaints about police mistreatment.
- We helped create procedures for accessibility in area hospitals for the Deaf community, provided several first responder agencies with training materials on Deaf communication, and assisted in the development of an American Sign Language video on voter registration and voting procedures.
- We registered voters, helped returning citizens get their voting rights back, and trained new members about how to stand up for themselves and their values in our democracy. We made more than 20,000 phone-bank calls.
- Each of our 13 chapters has experience organizing on statewide issues. We have organized hundreds of rallies, town halls, meetings with elected officials, and public comments at legislative hearings, in all major media markets and in a large number of State House and Senate districts over the year.
- We fought hard on environmental justice, pollution, and climate change issues — clean energy and clean jobs!

These are some of our statewide and national accomplishments, but the heart of the work takes place in our chapters. That's why this Annual Report features leaders who have given their time and energy to making change in their own communities. We hope you enjoy learning more about what these inspired leaders do and why they joined Virginia Organizing.

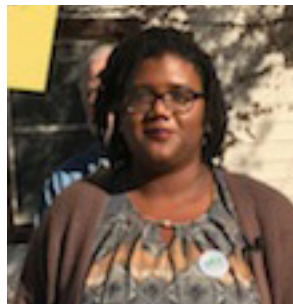
We also would like to celebrate our newest chapter, the Eastern Shore!

**Thank you for your support,
Del**

In 2017 we held 131 leadership trainings...

Valerie Washington of the Charlottesville Chapter

I became a leader at Virginia Organizing to learn how to help the people in my community. The predominantly black neighborhoods in Charlottesville are undergoing massive gentrification, and long term residents are being pushed out of their homes. Students in the Charlottesville city schools are being criminalized based on the color of their skin. And the young working class can't afford healthcare! The way the future is looking, I am not confident that Charlottesville will be for my family or me anymore. I would love to see preservation of the black neighborhoods, equity in education, and affordable health care through Medicaid expansion. I am dedicated to fighting for all three issues in order to give my child a fair chance.



We led six dismantling racism workshops...

Cheryl Chandler of the Danville Chapter



I like to exercise my rights as a human being. I like to treat people fairly. We've got a lot of things going on in life, and I believe that people should be treated with respect and allowed to exercise their voices. You've got to fight for what you believe in. Virginia Organizing helped me fight for what I believe in and make the path for the next generation that is to come. Most people just sit back and let you do the fighting by yourself. But guess what? I'm fighting—and I'm not alone! I wouldn't be here today without the Affordable Care Act. It really does help save people's lives!

Virginia Organizing's Board: Sandra Cook, Duane Edwards (Treasurer), Debra Grant (Vice-Chairperson), Emma Hale, Lily Hungarland, Jay (Janice) Johnson, Del McWhorter (Chairperson), Denise Smith (At-large Executive Committee)

Our oldest chapter, Lee County, won its campaign to get its hospital re-opened...

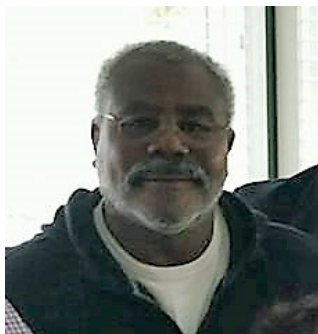
Malaika Mitchell of the Eastern Shore Chapter

I got involved with Virginia Organizing because I like the way they work. They don't come into a community and tell people what they should do. Instead, they ask people in the community what they want to see change. I have been an organizer, and I appreciate the ability we have to pull people together. Through my chapter I've met people who I never would have met any other way. We've held a health care rally, a school-to-prison pipeline forum that was well attended, a yard-sale fundraiser, and we have canvassed the community to ask about issues in schools.



We held 182 forums on health care, immigrant rights, civil rights, and economic growth...

Cliff Vaughan of the Fredericksburg Chapter



I got involved in the work to stop the school-to-prison pipeline with Virginia Organizing about two years ago. I was concerned about the way African American children and children with disabilities were getting hurt by it. We worked that campaign to a successful conclusion by extracting Sheriff's officers from the schools in our area and letting school administrators know that they would have to handle student discipline themselves.

Now we're working on an affordable housing campaign. I have a background in planning and was on the planning commission, so I've been able to help the chapter develop a strategy to influence local policy.

The Portsmouth Chapter won its campaign to change the school system's code of conduct...

We were mentioned in the media 193 times...

Micaela Escudero of the Harrisonburg Chapter

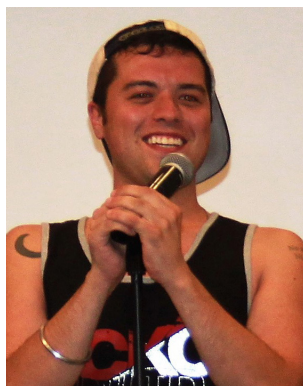
As an immigrant who migrated to the United States at a young age, and as a Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) recipient, I have seen and experienced the numerous effects that immigration policies have had on individuals and families in the Shenandoah Valley. In order to bring more attention to the issues that affect my local community and help



enact change, I volunteered and became a leader within the local Harrisonburg-Rockingham County Chapter to support DACA and TPS recipients in the area through planning and organizing events that helped to mobilize local community members.

We consulted with other groups 110 times...

Vicente Gonzalez of the Lynchburg Chapter



I work with the Lynchburg Chapter because our school system has had problems for a long time, and nobody else was taking it on until Virginia Organizing did. This work is a kind of redemption for my experience with the school system and lets me move on.

In addition to issues in the school system, there is so much racism, discrimination, and wealth disparity. People of color are marginalized and immigrants are silenced. These issues are really important to me, and our local Virginia Organizing chapter is looking at these problems.

The SAW Chapter won its campaign to convince Augusta Health to improve its accessibility to the deaf community...

We led 56 direct actions engaging thousands of members and supporters...



Dennis Hairston of the Martinsville Chapter

When a pair of student volunteers from William and Mary knocked on my door several years ago, what they said intrigued me. I showed up at a meeting a couple days later and have been there ever since. All the things we've done—banning the box, restoration of rights, and more—have been so powerful in my life. I've always had an activist streak, but I didn't know how to make something happen. The Bible tells us to love God with our mind, heart, and soul—and to love your neighbor as yourself. I want the same thing for other people that I want for myself. Virginia Organizing taught me how to leverage that passion to get real things done.

Organizers and leaders held 1,290 one to one meetings with new members...

Harvey James of the New River Valley Chapter

I joined Virginia Organizing because I wanted to give back to my community. I hoped we could be like a rock thrown into a pond, making ripples that influence the surrounding area more and more. The way we work suits me and my generation. I can do what I love. My heart is in helping lower income communities get equal treatment from their government. It's in getting people affordable health care. These things are not a crutch for anyone; they're a way to make our community more productive. Big thanks to Mrs. Nannie B. Hairston, the great civil rights leader of Christiansburg, who influenced me to be a part of my community and become the person I am today. She paved the way for you and me both, whether you knew her or not.



We supported groups that are working to stop the Atlantic Coast and Mountain Valley Pipelines and the Buckingham compressor station...

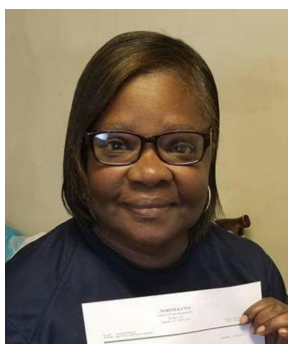
Carl Burden of the Portsmouth Chapter

For me Virginia Organizing was a breath of fresh air. I've worked in school systems for over 20 years as a coach and mentor for young people, and I've often met with groups to try to find solutions to our community's problems, but those meetings were always just talk. Our chapter, we're warriors. We're doers. We have a plan of action, and we will keep at it until decision makers realize that they are public servants.



In our first year Portsmouth focused on reducing the rate of school suspensions because it was much too high. We had to meet with school administrators again and again to accomplish our goals, but we won. The Portsmouth School Board changed their student code of conduct.

We met with legislators 48 times...



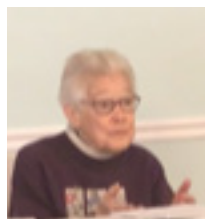
Barbara J. Harris of the South Hampton Roads Chapter

I participate in Virginia Organizing because they are up front and truthful people and they're really interested in the community. The thing that I really want to do is to make people more aware that they have choices. If they vote for the things they need in their community and the state, then their choices will come to fruition. That will lead to everyone's betterment.

We sent 182 letters to editors of newspapers...

Sister Beth Davies of the Southwest Chapters; Lee and Washington County

The Addiction Education Center in far Southwestern Virginia was only a small voice challenging the state to address the vital issue of OxyContin, and then untreated drug addiction. By joining other communities throughout the state, with the help of Virginia Organizing, the cries became louder, and those cries empowered the local community to stay its course.





Ronna Wertman of the Staunton/Augusta/ Waynesboro Chapter

I am a leader with Virginia Organizing because when the local chapter took a chance on issues concerning me and my Deaf family, they showed me what I had yet to see — that just as myself, my voice, my heart, my story mattered. Whether I tell that story through my voice or through my hands, even when they shake, a story has power, and you and I

have real power when we come together across every culture and take that passion out into the world. I want to see more barriers to communication broken down and attitudes shift so everyone, regardless of ability, can have meaningful access in our communities and to our government. When all voices are included at the table, we can begin to better understand the path forward and be a solid force for change.

Leaders learned 986 new power-building skills!



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